

IN THE SPECIFICATION

Please replace the paragraph on page 8, lines 12-20 of the specification as follows:

As set forth above, the nitridation process according to the invention does not require preheating of the nitrogen containing gas. This effect is demonstrated in FIG. 1 which is a graph showing the effect of using a torch furnace to preheat the NO gas on the amount of nitrogen incorporated into the oxide layer. The % nitrogen content of the oxide layer is plotted as a function of starting oxide thickness. Nitrogen content was determined from the change in oxide thickness upon reoxidation. This procedure is described in copending Application Serial No. 09/975,257 —/— (Attorney Docket No. 8229-013-27), filed on October 12, 2001 ~~even date herewith~~, which application is hereby incorporated by reference in its entirety.